

First Words

A First Steps Communications Tool for Families From Family to Family

One of the key people in your First Steps experience is your service coordinator.

Alphabet Soup

Each month we will cover a few acronyms parents might hear while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Many of you probably know by now that PT is short for physical therapy and OT is short for occupational therapy. How about these?

- DT=Developmental Therapy

Therapy designed to help develop the skills needed for learning. DT includes designing learning environments and activities to meet the individual needs of a child.

- SLP=Speech Language Pathologist

Often referred to as a speech therapist. The SLP promotes communication skills by focusing on difficulties with speech or language. This includes what a child can understand as well as how they can express communication.

What You Can Expect From Service Coordination

When your child entered First Steps, you may have added several new people to your everyday life. Sometimes it can be challenging to remember the role each of these new people play. One of the key people in your First Steps experience is your service coordinator. Do you know what to expect from a service coordinator?

The service coordinator serves as a single point of contact in helping you get the services and supports you need as a family. Service coordination is an active and ongoing process as the needs of your child and family evolve. One key

role service coordinators play is to ensure that families understand their rights, responsibilities, and the procedural safeguards available in First Steps, including the availability of advocacy services.

Service coordinators are responsible for coordinating and monitoring the delivery of the First Steps services your child receives. They coordinate evaluations and assessments that are needed at various times throughout the year and organize meetings where you discuss your concerns and needs with service providers. Your service coordinator facilitates the

development or revisions of your Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). She/he will coordinate this plan with your medical and health providers, and assist you in choosing therapists to provide your services.

Service coordinators also help you find resources and supports to meet your family needs that fall outside of First Steps services. When a child is leaving First Steps, the service coordinator also facilitates the development of a transition plan so the family can make decisions about any other programs or services that may benefit their child.

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Access for All at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

Excerpts from a FSSA press release January 15, 2004

The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) and The Children's Museum of Indianapolis are teaming up to help more limited-income kids experience the fun and educational offerings of the nation's largest museum for children.

The Children's Museum is now offering \$1 admission per person to families on certain types of public assistance, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps and Hoosier Healthwise, administered by FSSA. Families must show a

valid Hoosier Works or Hoosier Healthwise card and ID at the museum's box office. They'll then receive discounted admission at \$1 per family member and receive an Access Pass for \$1 admission the rest of the year.

"The Family and Social Services Administration applauds The Children's Museum for this important effort to open doors of learning to all children across the state. All families, regardless of their income or resources, should be able to experience all the fun and education the museum

offers," said Cheryl Sullivan, Secretary of the Indiana FSSA.

"The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is deeply committed to creating extraordinary learning experiences for all children and families throughout Indiana," said The Children's Museum President & CEO Dr. Jeffrey H. Patchen. "Our new Access Pass initiative further opens our doors to children and their families all over the state of Indiana.

For more information on The Children's Museum visit www.childrensmuseum.org.

Advocacy Tip of the Month

Consider that on average, a two year old who sleeps 10 hours per night and takes a 3 hour daily nap, has 11,340 minutes of awake time every week for learning new things, practicing new skills, and perfecting old ones. How many of those minutes are spent with you? How many with a caregiver? How many of those minutes are spent with an early intervention provider on a weekly basis? To ensure that you and your child get the most out of the early intervention services he or she receives each week, get down on that floor and get involved! Understanding how to make a difference in your child's development is a huge part of becoming his or her best advocate.

By sitting with your child's therapists, watching what they do and asking questions, you can learn how to best help your child during the time you spend together. Ask for ideas for things you can do along with your everyday activities, like when you are feeding, changing a diaper, giving a bath, or even pushing your child around the grocery! By doing little things each day, you can make a dramatic difference in the results of your child's early intervention services.

If your child receives services in a child care setting, talk to your child care provider to ensure that your child's caregiver spends part of each visit learning what they can do to support your child's development. You can also talk to your IFSP team about scheduling a regular visit during a time that you as parents can participate in the session. Evening or weekend visits once a month are one way parents have found to participate in their child's services. If you are a working parent, ask your service coordinator for other ideas about how you can participate in a way that works best for your family.

Coming Soon To A SPOE Near You.... Clustering!

First Steps is in the process of reorganizing System Point of Entry (SPOE) offices across the state. As of April 1, the state will divide into 14 cluster areas with 14 SPOEs rather than the existing county SPOE offices. A map of these newly formed clusters, as well as, cluster contact information, can be found under the "Clustering" icon on the First Steps website. This reorganization is an effort by the state to utilize First Steps dollars more efficiently while continuing to maintain a high level of quality services.

SPOE funding will now be tied to the performance of the cluster and the individual

counties within the cluster. While SPOEs are clustering, most counties will maintain their county LPCCs (local planning and coordinating councils). These councils will continue to meet in their local communities, and as parents your participation is encouraged and needed. First Steps will continue to carefully monitor outcomes to ensure the maintenance and ongoing improvement of operations.

For more information about participating on your local First Steps Councils, contact Family to Family at dlarlandf2f@insightbb.com.

What Can You Expect From Service Coordination

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This sounds like a big job, and it is! In order to be sure your child and family gets the most out of your First Steps experience, be sure to keep

your service coordinator informed of your changing family needs. He/she will be happy to connect you to resources, support or services that can help.

Resources for Families and Providers

Check out these web resources on service coordination.

Research and Training Center on Service Coordination
<http://www.uconncced.org/rtrc/rtrchome.htm>

News Brief: What Do Professionals and Parents Want and Expect from Early Childhood Services?
<http://ericec.org/osep/newsbriefs/news33.html>